

## Health Care Reform

As Congress considers health care reform, Mike wants to hear from you. The full legislative text of the American Affordable Health Choices Act, which was introduced on July 14, 2009 by House leaders and the committees on Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means, can be found by clicking [HERE](#).

As materials on the bill become available they will be posted here:

- Energy & Commerce Committee clearinghouse
- Education & Labor Committee clearinghouse
- Ways & Means Committee clearinghouse
- PDF summary of the bill
- President's statement

Mike has joined with his colleagues to advocate on behalf of a number of important health care priorities and principles. Below, you will find the full text of letters that Mike has signed.

- Supporting a robust public option (PDF)
- Rural Issues – this letter asks that House Leadership take special consideration of the obstacles that rural areas will face in health care reform, such as work force shortages and low reimbursement rates (PDF)
- Urging that Medicare geographic payment inequities be a priority that's addressed in health care reform, as well as incentivizing high-quality, efficient care (PDF)
- Urging that health care reform not be funded by any tax increases on the benefits of veterans (PDF)
- Protecting Small Businesses (PDF)
- Letter urging sufficient time for Congress and the American people to review the legislation before it's considered for a vote. It also supports deficit neutrality, delivery system reform, small business protections, rural health equity, and bipartisanship (PDF)
- Supporting the reduction of prescription drug costs for seniors – addressing the "doughnut hole"

(PDF)

- Protecting low-income families &ndash; strengthening and investing in Medicaid and CHIP, setting reasonable limits on cost-sharing, and requiring the provision of comprehensive benefits (PDF)

A guest op-ed that Mike wrote on health care reform that was in the Bangor Daily News on July 15, 2009 can be found below.

Health care reform that's good for Maine

By Mike Michaud

We have a historic opportunity finally to enact health care reform in our country. I have heard from many Mainers and the message is clear: The status quo is clearly unacceptable.

Nationally, costs are skyrocketing, millions have no health insurance at all, and many millions more are underinsured.

Premiums have doubled in nine years and have grown three times faster than wages. This is pinching everyone's ability to make ends meet. Average American families already pay an extra \$1,100 per year in premiums to support a broken system with 46 million uninsured. And soaring costs harm the competitiveness of American businesses in the global economy and eat up a larger chunk of our gross domestic product every year.

We have the most expensive health care system in the world. Our country spends almost 50 percent more per person on health care than the next most costly nation. But we're no healthier for it. And if we do nothing, in a decade, we'll be spending \$1 of every \$5 on health care. In 30 years, it will be \$1 of every \$3.

The need for reform is undeniable, but so is the need to get it right.

I commend President Obama for making health care reform a priority, and I support a public option approach. Like the president, I believe that if people like their current health insurance they should be able to keep it and continue to see the doctors they have grown to trust. But if people don't like their health insurance or have none, a properly structured public insurance option could provide an affordable alternative.

Health care reform is too big an issue to rush, and it's important that Mainers know what it consists of before Congress votes on it. That's why I recently sent a letter with my colleagues that asked congressional leaders to promote an open and bipartisan process that allows members of Congress and the American people sufficient time to review the bill and add their input. Our letter also requested that Congress live up to the president's goals of passing comprehensive reform that is deficit-neutral and that lowers costs for our families and businesses, increases the quality of care provided, and expands access for every American. In addition, we urged congressional leaders to make sure that small businesses and rural areas are treated fairly in any reform efforts.

My signing this letter was in no way an attempt to disrupt the process or water down a public insurance option, but rather a request for thoughtful consideration of the most important public policy issue of our time — with probably only one chance for us to get it right.

When members of Congress and the public are not even given enough time to read what is being voted on, that is when trouble sets in. That is when the special interest exceptions, giveaways and lobbyist goodies are slipped into bills. That is when things that seem great on paper turn out to be not much more than the paper they are written on in reality.

What if we ended up with a public option that didn't cover pre-existing conditions or had deductibles out of reach for most Americans? Or worse yet, what if we ended up with a bill such as the Medicare Drug benefit, which was spun as being in the best interests of seniors, but ended up with billions in taxpayer giveaways to the insurance and pharmaceutical industries?

I support a public insurance option, but I also believe that it is important that it be affordable and properly structured to address the needs of rural states like Maine. One such very serious concern with the current draft of the bill is that using Medicare-like rates for a public option would have a grave effect on Maine.

The formula now used to reimburse physicians and hospitals through Medicare puts rural states at a disadvantage by undercutting payments to our health care providers and contributing to higher health care premiums in Maine. Making matters worse, there is a severe shortage of health care providers in our state, and this number will continue to decrease unless we can develop a reimbursement system that will not drive our providers out of business and, ultimately, out of Maine altogether.

In the end, we must fix what is broken to create a competitive public insurance option that providers can participate in and that Mainers can access. I remain optimistic that we can pass a bill that addresses inequities in the current system.

But we must be thoughtful in the process and not squander this historic opportunity to bring the reality of affordable health care to all Americans.

Mike Michaud, a Democrat, represents Maine's 2nd Congressional District.